

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for providing interactive television (ITV) content for a television program via a server over a data communications network, the method comprising:

receiving client software for a client to operate on a user-based hardware device that has the ability to control a display, the client software including:

base software for causing ITV information to be displayed on the display and including software responsive to messages from the server relating to different types of ITV interactivity,

program content applicable to a plurality of television episodes of the television program, and

episode content including ITV components applicable to a particular one of the plurality of television episodes of the television program, wherein the program content and the episode content with the ITV components are downloaded from the server to the client before the beginning of the particular television episode, the downloaded ITV components including episode content including ITV components with ITV information for later display during the particular television episode ~~and being received by the client before the beginning of the particular television episode, the interactive downloaded ITV components being displayed during the particular television episode in accordance with predetermined times or in response to the messages from the server and prompting user interaction in response to the display of the ITV components information;~~

generating, by a computer separate from the server and the client, a particular message associated with at least one of the downloaded ITV components of a particular television episode, the particular message including a message type identifier identifying a specific layout

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template for displaying the at least one of the downloaded ITV components in a specific layout format;

transmitting the particular message by the computer over the data communications network;

~~during the particular television episode the client receiving from the server over the data communications network a the particular one of the messages associated with at least one of the downloaded ITV components related to the particular television episode transmitted by the computer over the data communications network, the particular message being received separately from the at least one of the downloaded ITV components, the particular message including a message type identifier identifying a category of ITV content triggered via the particular message;~~

retrieving by the client the message type identifier from the received message;

retrieving by the client the layout template stored in the client specific to the retrieved message type identifier;

formatting by the client the at least one of the downloaded ITV components in the specific layout format based on the retrieved layout template; and

~~displaying by the client the at least one of the downloaded ITV components on the display in the particular layout format, wherein the message type identifier minimizes data transfer over the data communications network by avoiding transmitting with the message specific graphics data that achieves the particular layout format in response to receipt of the particular message and based on the category of ITV content identified in the particular message.~~

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising, for a next episode, receiving new episode content with components related to the next episode prior to the beginning of the next episode without again receiving the program content and the base software.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising, for an episode of a different program, receiving a different program content and a different episode content

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without again receiving the base software prior to the beginning of the episode of the different program, and using the base software with the different program content and the different episode content for the episode of the different program.

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the ITV components include a question to which a user can respond.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 5, wherein the ITV components include a trivia question and a poll.

7. (Cancelled)

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6 further comprising displaying a point count for the trivia question that changes with time.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the base software, responsive to a user entering an answer to the trivia question, causes the answer to be provided to the server to determine if it is correct.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein the base software, responsive to a user entering an answer to the trivia question, checks the answer against an answer stored as part of the episode content.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6, wherein one of the client and server corrects an answer provided to the trivia question, the client receiving from the server and displaying a point total for multiple users interacting at the same time with the server.

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12. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the client is presentation layer independent.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the client operates with a particular type of presentation software.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the client sending messages from the user to the server and receiving messages from other users via the server in a chat functionality during the particular episode of the program.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the episode content includes a plurality of advertisements, the base software being responsive to the particular message for causing one of the advertisements to be displayed.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the client is responsive to the receipt of the particular message and audio or video information for synchronizing the audio or video information to the type of interactivity indicated by the particular message.

17. (Currently Amended) A method for a server to provide interactive television (ITV) content for a television program over a data communications network, the method comprising:

providing client software to a client with a user-based hardware device having the ability to control a display, the client software including:

base software for causing ITV information to be displayed on the display,

program content applicable to a plurality of television episodes of the television program, and

episode content including ITV components applicable to a particular one of the plurality of television episodes of the television program, wherein the program content and

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episode content with the ITV components are provided by the server to the client before the beginning of the particular television episode, the ITV components including episode content including ITV components with ITV information for later display during the particular television episode, the ITV components prompting user interaction in response to the display of the ITV componentsinformation:

receiving by the server from a computer separate from the server and the client, a particular message associated with at least one of the ITV components of a particular television episode, the particular message including a message type identifier identifying a specific layout template for displaying the at least one of the ITV components in a specific layout format; and

during the particular television episode, the server providing-forwarding the received message to the client over the data communications network a message associated with at least one of the ITV components previously provided to the client and related to the particular television episode, the message being received separately from the at least one of the ITV components, the message including a message type identifier identifying a category of ITV content triggered via the message; and, wherein the client is configured to:

retrieve the message type identifier from the forwarded message;

retrieve the layout template stored in the client specific to the retrieved message type identifier;

format the at least one of the ITV components in the specific layout format based on the retrieved layout template; and

display the at least one of the ITV components on the display in the particular layout format, wherein the message type identifier minimizes data transfer over the data communications network by avoiding transmitting with the message specific graphics data that achieves the particular layout format.

displaying the at least one of the downloaded ITV components on the display in response to receipt of the message and based on the category of ITV content identified in the message.

18. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 17, further comprising, for a next episode, providing new episode content with a plurality of components prior to the beginning of the next episode without again providing the program content and the base software.

19. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 17, further comprising, for an episode of a different program, providing a different program content and a different episode content without again providing the base software prior to the beginning of the episode.

20. (Cancelled)

21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 17, wherein one of the ITV components include a question to which the user can respond.

22. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the ITV components include a trivia question and a poll.

23. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein the server is responsive to the base software providing either an answer for correction or an indication that the answer was correct for providing to users point totals indicating points in response to the answers provided.

24. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein the client is provided to be presentation layer independent.

25. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein the client is provided and adapted to operate on a particular type of presentation software.

26. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 17, further comprising invoking a software interface on the computer for managing the server and providing messages to and receiving messages from the server.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the server provides messages received from users to the software interface during the episode, wherein the software interface is further invoked to transmit responses to the server for forwarding to the users.

28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein at least some questions for responses are transmitted by the software interface to the server, and thereafter to the users on-the-fly during the particular episode.

29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the program is a television program, wherein the software interface is invoked to provide the program or episode content to the server for transmission to the users, the program or episode content being stored and timed to be received by the user in such a way that the program or episode content is synchronized to the television program to display content relevant to the program at that time.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29, wherein the program or episode content is provided to be stored in advance of being displayed and is timed to appear at selected times.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 30, wherein the software interface receives supplemental content in response to a human input and provides the supplemental content on the fly as a supplement to the program or episode content provided to be stored in advance.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29, wherein the software interface receives supplemental content in response to a human input and provides the supplemental content on the fly to appear at a desired time such that the supplemental content is relevant to the program at the desired time.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 17, wherein the episode content includes a plurality of advertisements for client storage, the server sending the message to indicate to the client that the client should cause one of the stored advertisements to be displayed.

34. (Previously Presented) The methods of claim 17, wherein the server provides audio or video information synchronized to textual messages to cause the textual messages to be displayed with the audio and/or video content.

35- 45. (Cancelled)

46. (Currently Amended) A method for providing interactive television (ITV) content for a television program over a data communications network, the method comprising:

a client downloading ITV content applicable to an episode of the television program from a server for storage on user-based hardware that also controls ITV information displayed on a display, the ITV content including a plurality of ITV components prompting user interaction in response to the display of the ITV components information, the client receiving downloading the ITV content prior to the beginning of the episode of the television program;

generating, by a computer separate from the server, a particular message associated with at least one of the downloaded ITV components the particular message including a message type identifier identifying a specific layout template for displaying the at least one of the downloaded ITV components in a specific layout format;

transmitting the particular message by the computer over the data communications network;

during the episode of the television program, receiving [[a]] the particular message over the data communications network from a server associated with at least one of the plurality of ITV components of the stored ITV content to be displayed transmitted by the computer, the message being received separately [[form]] from the at least one of the downloaded plurality of ITV components; the message including a message type identifier identifying a category of ITV content triggered via the message;

retrieving by the client the message type identifier from the received message;

retrieving by the client the layout template stored in the client specific to the retrieved message type identifier;

formatting by the client the at least one of the downloaded ITV components in the specific layout format based on the retrieved layout template; and

displaying by the client the at least one of the downloaded plurality of ITV components on the display in response to receipt of the message and based on the category of ITV content identified in the message—the particular layout format, wherein the message type identifier minimizes data transfer over the data communications network by avoiding transmitting with the message specific graphics data that achieves the particular layout format.

47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, further comprising receiving additional content on-the-fly for display during the television program.

48. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, further comprising, prior to receipt of any of a plurality of episodes of the television program, receiving common content related to the plurality of episodes, and prior to each episode, downloading content particular to that episode.

49. (Currently Amended) A method for providing interactive television (ITV) content for a television program over a data communications network, the method comprising:

a server providing over the data communications network, ITV content applicable to an episode of the television program, to a client with a user-based hardware for storage, the user-based hardware including control software to control [[the]] display of the ITV content to a user, the ITV content including a plurality of ITV components prompting user interaction with the ITV components in response to the display of the ITV components, the server providing the ITV content prior to the beginning of the episode of the television program;

receiving by the server from a computer separate from the server and the client, a particular message associated with at least one of the ITV components, the particular message including a message type identifier identifying a specific layout template for displaying the at least one of the ITV components in a specific layout format; and

during the episode of the television program, the server forwarding the received providing a message to the client over the data communications network from a server to the user-based hardware, the message being received separately from the at least one of the plurality of ITV components, the message including a message type identifier identifying a category of ITV content triggered via the message; and, wherein the client is configured to:

retrieve the message type identifier from the forwarded message;

retrieve the layout template stored in the client specific to the retrieved message type identifier;

format the at least one of the ITV components in the specific layout format based on the retrieved layout template; and

display the at least one of the ITV components on the display in the particular layout format, wherein the message type identifier minimizes data transfer over the data communications network by avoiding transmitting with the message specific graphics data that achieves the particular layout format.

displaying the at least one of the plurality of ITV components on the display in response to receipt of the message and based on the category of ITV content identified in the message.

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50. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 49, further comprising providing additional content for display on-the-fly during the television program.

51. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the ITV components is displayed based on predetermined times during the particular episode.

52. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, wherein further ITV components are received and displayed on-the-fly.

53-54. (Cancelled)

55. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the client software is stand-alone application.

56. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the client software is a web-browser application.

57. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[62]]1, wherein the graphics data is preloaded by the client and the base software retrieves the preloaded graphics data that achieves the particular layout format.

58. (Cancelled)

59. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the message type identifier identifies the at least one of the downloaded ITV components triggered via the message as being one of trivia, poll, and advertisement.

60. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[1]]17, wherein the one of the downloaded-ITV components is dynamically selected for display during the particular television episode, ~~the method further comprising:~~

~~generating the message by an ITV directing device, the message identifying the dynamically selected ITV component; and~~

~~transmitting the generated message to the server by the ITV directing device.~~

61-63. (Canceled).

64. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the computer generates the message on the fly in response to input from the client.

65. (New) The method of claim 49, wherein the computer generates the message on the fly in response to input from the client.

66. (New) The method of claim 49, wherein the server if configured to forward the received message along with the at least one of the ITV components over the data communications network in response to receipt of the message from the computer.